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SUBJECT: DISTRICT COURT OVERTURNS RUSSIAN BANKER BABENKO'S
ASYLUM DECISION

REFTEL: VILNIUS 355

¶1. Vilnius District Administrative Court revoked on May 22 the Migration Department's decision granting Russian banker Igor Babenko asylum in Lithuania. Babenko has seven days to appeal to the Supreme Administrative Court. Barring an appeal, the ruling sets the stage for the Vilnius Appeals Court to continue hearings on Russia's extradition request which had been suspended pending a final ruling on his asylum status. A district court ruled in September 2005 to extradite Babenko to Russia where he faces charges for allegedly laundering USD 12 million of Yukos-owned Menatep Bank funds.

BACKGROUND CASE HISTORY

¶2. Lithuanian authorities arrested Babenko in Vilnius on July 1, 2005, after Russia requested his extradition to pursue an investigation of money laundering. A district court ruled on September 28, 2005, to extradite Babenko to Russia, and he appealed the decision to the Vilnius Appeals Court. While court proceedings on the extradition were ongoing, the Migration Department granted refugee status to Babenko on January 30, 2006, and granted him permission to live in Lithuania. The Court of Appeals hearing Babenko's extradition case suspended hearings pending the outcome of the Lithuanian Prosecutor General's Office appeal of the decision of the Migration Department to grant asylum status. On April 7, a Vilnius court extended Babenko's detention for three months (reftel).

KELLY